

**Summary of Dissertation Recitals:
Three Programs of Collaborative Piano Music**

by

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Abstract

Three collaborative piano recitals were performed in lieu of a written dissertation.

The repertoire and themes of these recitals aimed to highlight the characteristics of French and German Romanticism, and Western music inspired by Eastern culture. The first recital featured French Romanticism and contained works by Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy, and Maurice Ravel. In the second recital, German Romanticism was highlighted, with works by Albert Dietrich, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Alma Mahler, and Erich Korngold. This program included a performance of rarely heard *F. A. E Sonata*, a joint composition by three of the aforementioned composers. The final recital was a lecture-recital titled “Chinese Culture through a Western Lens”. It focused on four sets of works based on either Chinese musical art or ancient poetry, composed by Fritz Kreisler, Derek Healey, Pavel Haas, and John Alden Carpenter.

November 11, 2020, 8:00 p.m.; Moore Building, Britton Recital Hall, University of Michigan. Juliet Schlefer, soprano; Brian Allen, violin. Gabriel Fauré, *Violin Sonata* no. 1; Claude Debussy, *Proses Lyriques*; Maurice Ravel, *Tzigane*.

March 16, 2021, 8:00 p.m.; Moore Building, Britton Recital Hall, University of Michigan. Meridian Prall, mezzo-soprano; Brian Allen, violin; Ben Penzner, viola. Albert Dietrich, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, *F. A. E Sonata*; Johannes Brahms, *Zwei Gesänges*, op. 91; Alma Mahler, *Fünf Lieder*; Erich Korngold, *Four Pieces from the incidental music to Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing*, op. 11.

April 14, 2021, 6:00 p.m.; Stearns Building, Cady Room, University of Michigan. Juliet Schlefer, soprano; Meridian Prall, mezzo-soprano; Nicholas Music, tenor; Michael Romans, violin. Fritz Kreisler, *Tambourin Chinois*; Derek Healey, *Three Album Leaves*, op. 107a; Pavel Haas, *Čínské písně*, op. 4; John Alden Carpenter, *Water-colors*.

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM

Chao Gao, Piano
Juliet Schlefer, Soprano
Brian Allen, Violin

Violin Sonata no. 1 (1876)
Allegro molto
Andante
Allegro vivo
Allegro quasi presto

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)

Brian Allen, violin

Intermission

Proses Lyriques (1893)
De Rêve
De Grève
De Fleurs
De Soir

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

Juliet Schlefer, soprano

Tzigane (1924)

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Brian Allen, violin

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM NOTES

De Rêve

The composer Florent Schmitt always portrayed his teacher, Gabriel Fauré, as an “unintentional, unwitting revolutionary,” a surprising statement about a composer who is most famous for his gentle Requiem and small-scale songs. Fauré began to compose the *Violin Sonata No.1 in A, Op. 13* in the summer of 1875 and dedicated it to the violinist and composer Paul Viardot, the son of well-known singer Pauline Viardot. The premier took place the following year, in 1877. This work has been recognized as Fauré’s first masterpiece and has remained a staple of the standard violin repertoire ever since. It is quite hard for us today to imagine how adventurous this work was in 1870’s France. Bizet’s *Carmen* – much more musically conservative – had just premiered a couple of years earlier. Unsurprisingly, this sonata was regarded as an incomprehensible modern creation and rejected by a perplexed Parisian public. No French publisher would accept it, but with the effort of the composer’s friend, Camille Clerc, it was finally published by Breitkopf & Härtel. Fauré was not even compensated for this publication. Saint-Saëns, however, had a different opinion on this work: “in this sonata, you can find everything to tempt a gourmet: new forms, excellent modulations, unusual tone colors, and the uses of unexpected rhythms... and magic floats above everything, encompassing the whole work, causing the crowd of usual listeners to accept the unimagined audacity as something quite normal. With this work, Monsieur Fauré takes his place among the masters.”

The shimmering first movement begins with a passionate piano solo that presents the main theme, and is followed by a variation of that theme played by the violin. Supported by powerful bass octaves and arpeggio patterns in the piano, the violin moves mercurially from one

idea to another. The descending second theme is introduced by the violin, accompanied by a murmur of triplets in the piano. A fiery restatement of the main theme by both instruments concludes the movement. The *Andante* is poignant and introverted, its undulating triplet subdivision reminiscent of a gently flowing barcarolle. It begins in the dark key of D minor and closes in D major. The short-long lilting pulse dominates the rhythmical texture, which throbs consistently throughout the movement. The vivacious *Scherzo* begins like a lighting flash. Brilliant and crispy punctuated, Fauré chooses the time signature of 2/8, which creates an airy and light atmosphere without the sense of ordinary downbeats. In the graceful and melancholy trio section, the opening theme reappears in rhythmic augmentation, and the movement suddenly vanishes in a chain of pizzicato notes. The finale is a sweetly rippling rondo that demonstrates both virtuosity and charm.

During the 1890s, Paris was still under the spell of Richard Wagner's music. Musicians and writers were both inspired by the German composer's aesthetic concept, which integrates every possible element of music, text, and stage drama. When Claude Debussy returned home after his prize-winning stay in Rome, he felt a strong connection to the movement of literary symbolism. Symbolism, a modern aesthetic espoused by writers such as Paul Verlaine and Stephan Mallarmé, sought to explore subject matter by inference and suggestion, rather than direct reference or explanation. In 1892, immediately before he started to write his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Debussy composed *Proses Lyriques*, a set of four large-scale songs based on poetry he penned himself. Around this time, Debussy set nine songs of free verse and prose in succession, yet *Proses Lyriques* is the only set based on Debussy's own texts. This was probably another inspiration from Wagner, who worked with his own writing exclusively. The subject

matter of these four songs is derived from the prominent contemporary symbolist poets – the evil flowers of Baudelaire, Laforgue’s cynical view of Sundays, Louÿs’s recollection of bygone ages, and the struggles of Mallarmé. Like the other Symbolists, Debussy was interested in dealing with subjects indirectly, so the reader is meant to unlock the actual meaning of the poetry largely through intuition and emotional association.

De Rêve is a study in contrasts between dreams and reality. The singer is lost in an old fairy tale scene of medieval chivalry, surely inspired by Wagner’s Parsifal. The music ebbs and flows in a wash of dense textures and jarring temporal shifts. Modal harmonies suggest an atmosphere of timelessness, and whole tone scales evoke magic, just as in modern cinema. *De Rêve* is the longest song and most colorful song in the whole set. It contains the most variety of musical texture and perfectly represents the atmospheric, modern quality of Debussy’s music. The next song, *De Grève* was inspired by J. M. W. Turner’s painting *Seascape with Buoy*, which portrays a storm forming over the ocean at twilight, when the moon comes out and shines on the waves as we hear the ringing of distant bells. Debussy brought this English watercolor to life through music by constantly varying the registers and densities of texture throughout the song. It is as if he is painting with sound. The emotional climax of the set can be found in *De Fleurs*, in which flowers, normally considered natural and beautiful, become stifling and malevolent in the confines of an eternally bright and artificial hothouse. The frustration and desperation we find here are typical of the Art Nouveau movement and its preoccupation with the concept of *ennui*, a type of existential dread that is terribly coupled with feelings of boredom and meaninglessness. The first section of the finale, *De Soir*, details what happens in an ordinary Sunday in a technologically advanced city, and the second section is a solemn and sincere prayer to “the Virgin, golden silver” to have pity on the city and the hearts of its inhabitants.

Being so colorful and varied texturally, *Proses Lyriques* lent itself beautifully to orchestration, which was eventually done by the composer's friend, Roger-Ducasse.

Ravel moved out of Paris in the years after the 1914-18 war. During that period of time, his compositions include a violin sonata, a sonata for violin and cello, and *Tzigane*. This concert-rhapsody was inspired by Ravel's acquaintance with the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Arányi, who was the great-niece of the influential violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim. *Tzigane* was finished in 1924, and included d'Arányi's own improvised additions. Ravel originally conceived it for violin and piano with optional luthéal attachment (a hybrid instrument invented by a Belgian musician and inventor, Georges Cloetens, which allows the piano to produce an illusion sound of a cimbalom). *Tzigane* opens in true gypsy flair with a long, challenging unaccompanied violin cadenza, and the rest of the composition displays a firework-like virtuosity for both players. Like an homage to Paganini and Liszt, it outdoes the technical challenges of the century, meanwhile artfully capturing the spirit of the Romani, or "gypsy" style. It was later orchestrated by the composer.

RECITAL 2 PROGRAM

Chao Gao, Piano
Meridian Prall, Mezzo-soprano
Brian Allen, Violin
Ben Penzner, Viola

F. A. E. Sonata

Allegro

Intermezzo: Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale: Markiertes, ziemlich lebhaftes Tempo

Albert Dietrich (1829-1908)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Robert Schumann

Brian Allen, violin

Intermission

Zwei Gesänge, op. 91

Gestillte Sehnsucht

Geistliches Wiegenlied

Johannes Brahms

Meridian Prall, mezzo-soprano

Ben Penzner, viola

Fünf Lieder

Die stille Stadt

In meines Vaters Garten

Laue Sommernacht

Bei dir ist es traut

Ich wandle unter Blumen

Alma Mahler

(1879-1964)

Meridian Prall, mezzo-soprano

Four Pieces from the incidental music to Shakespeare's
Much Ado About Nothing, op. 11

Erich Korngold
(1897-1957)

The Maiden in the Bridal Chamber
Dogberry and Verges (March of the Watch)
Scene in the Garden
Masquerade (Hornpipe)

Ben Penzner, viola

RECITAL 2 PROGRAM NOTES

German Romanticism from Brahms to Korngold

The sonata was a common and highly important form for Romantic composers; it allowed them to show their skill in writing creative, personal, yet proportionally balanced music. The *F. A. E. Sonata* is one of the most unique essays in this form. A rare example of a collaborative composition between three composers, it is based on the idea of using letters to represent words and musical notes. In 1853, Robert Schumann proposed to his pupil Albert Dietrich and good friend Brahms that they could, as a surprise, write a sonata for violin and piano for their common friend, Joseph Joachim – the most internationally celebrated violinist in the 19th century. The title “F. A. E” derives from Joachim’s musical motto *Frei aber einsam* (“free but alone”). The opening movement is by Dietrich, Brahms composed the scherzo (which has been widely performed as a single movement work), and Schumann wrote the second and final movements. Without knowing in advance who had composed which movement, during the first performance (sight-read by Joachim and Clara Schumann), Joachim identified them accurately and quickly on his first try.

The main thematic three-note motive “F. A. E” is recognizable throughout the sonata. On the title page inscription, Schumann even left a clue to this three-letter combination in retrograde form: “*In Erwartung der Ankunft des verehrten und geliebten Freundes Joseph Joachim schreiben diese Sonate Robert Schumann, Albert Dietrich und Jon. Brahms*” (In Expectation of the Arrival of the esteemed and beloved Friend Joseph Joachim, this sonata is written by Robert Schumann, Albert Dietrich and Johannes Brahms). Moreover, the inversion of the three-note motive – the notes “G#, E, A” – were used to signal the name of Gisela von Arnim, whom

Joachim loved. For some reason, Brahms was the only composer of the three not to use this letter-based thematic material in his movement. We do find it, however, in the finale of his *Piano Sonata in F minor*, Op. 5 No. 3.

Brahms composed his ***Zwei Gesänge Op. 91***—one of the treasures of the vocal chamber music repertoire – for viola (his favorite instrument) and mezzo-soprano. The color and timbre of the mezzo-soprano voice perfectly matches that of the viola. Brahms dedicated these two extended songs to his musical partners and personal friends, the eminent violinist Joseph Joachim (who also played viola) and his wife, the talented mezzo-soprano Amalie Schneeweiss. The songs were published in reverse order: *Geistliches Wiegenlied* was composed twenty years earlier than *Gestillte Sehnsucht*, when Joachim and Amalie were expecting their first child. This happy time faded quickly, and the couple became irreparably estranged in 1880. *Gestillte Sehnsucht* was Brahms’ rather clumsy attempt to reconcile their relationship. Unfortunately, this well-intentioned gesture only made matters worse. The song failed to repair the rift, and Brahms also fractured his friendship with Joachim when he chose Amalie’s side during the divorce proceedings.

Gestillte Sehnsucht was composed in 1884 on a text by German Romantic poet Friedrich Rückert that expresses a yearning desire. The viola has an independent tune that sings a beautiful duet with the voice, and the rustling broken chords in the piano support the two melodies. In the second song, which originated during the happier times of 1864, Brahms quotes the medieval Christmas carol “Josef, lieber lieber mein” – a lullaby sung to baby Jesus by the Virgin Mary. The poem is from Geibel and Heyse’s *Spanisches Liederbuch*, and is Geibel’s translation of the Spanish of Lope de Vega (a Spanish playwright and poet in the Golden Age of Baroque

literature). The melody in the voice coupled with the old tune on the viola provide a continual connecting thread that is accompanied by a piano part rarely rising above the middle range. The simplicity and calm expressiveness create a gentle rocking lilt – a tender lullaby. The timbres of the instruments are exquisitely blended and the poetry is perfectly amplified by Brahms' sensitive combination. It is easy to see why this set is held up as an example one of the composer's greatest achievements in song.

Alma Maria Schindler was the infamous wife of Gustav Mahler. She grew up surrounded by artists and musicians and was a gifted pianist. Like Korngold, she studied composition with Alexander von Zemlinsky. Her husband discouraged her from composing at first, but changed his mind after hearing her songs. *Fünf Lieder* were composed around 1901 – the year before she married Gustav – and eventually published in 1910. Alma clearly stayed up to date on the poetry of her contemporaries, Richard Dehmel, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Gustav Falke, as well as their forerunner Heinrich Heine. She uses a late harmonic language to support her literary tastes, which were deeply influenced by Zemlinsky and Schoenberg. Every musical gesture in these songs is in service of the text.

Die stille Stadt is by Richard Dehmel (who's *Verklärte Nacht* inspired Schoenberg's string sextet). The dense, sensual harmony subtly hints at the sound world of Richard Wagner. *In meines Vaters Garten*, Alma Mahler's longest song, likely recalls times she spent with her father. *Laue Sommernacht* is declamatory and very speech-like, the vocal line moving in simple stepwise motion much of the time. When leaps do occur, even if vocally awkward, they vibrantly bring the text to life. The final two songs, *Bei dir ist es traut* and *Ich wandle unter Blumen* are on a much smaller scale and more conventional in terms of texture and harmonic language.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold – who at only nine years old impressed Gustav Mahler with his cantata, *Gold* – ranks among history’s most extraordinary composer prodigies. Although he began playing the piano at a very young age and had a special connection to the instrument, Korngold never intended to pursue a performing career. Not content with merely recreating pre-existing compositions, he leaned towards composing. His knack for improvisation gave him a deep and constantly growing reserve of new musical material. Mahler encouraged this compositional direction, recommending him to Alexander von Zemlinsky for private study. In 1910, his ballet-pantomime *Der Schneemann* was received with critical acclaim, and around the same time, the legendary Arthur Schnabel began to perform Korngold’s *Piano Sonata No. 2* in his concerts. Two years later, Schnabel and the eminent violinist Carl Flesch performed his *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. By the time Korngold was 20, his orchestral works had been performed by several major orchestras in Europe. At the age of 23, his opera *Die tote Stadt* made him world-famous. Korngold later moved to Hollywood and devoted himself to film music, returning to Europe only after the Second World War. By this time, his music was no longer in vogue. His death attracted only passing attention, and it was not until the centenary of his birth in 1997 that his music began to spark renewed interest.

In 1918, Korngold was invited by the Vienna Burgtheater to write incidental music to Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*. He wrote fourteen numbers for a small pit orchestra. Two years later, when the production was revived at the Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, the show was so popular that it had to be extended by popular demand. The orchestra members, however, were not available to add performances, so the composer arranged the score for violin and piano in consultation with the violinist Rudolf Kolisch.

The Maiden in the Bridal Chamber sets a romantic tone, portraying the uncertain yet undeniable emotion of the bride. *Dogberry and Verges* is a humorous, stuttering march that vividly depicts the drunken night watchmen's lack of control. *The Scene in the Garden* is a peaceful slow waltz, and the witty, virtuosic finale – *Masquerade: Hornpipe* – concludes the suite in robust, good cheer.

RECITAL 3 PROGRAM

Chao Gao, Piano
Juliet Schlefer, Soprano
Meridian Prall, Mezzo-soprano
Nicholas Music, Tenor
Michael Romans, Violin

Tambourin Chinois

Fritz Kreisler
(1875-1962)

Michael Romans, violin

Three Album Leaves, op. 107a
The Ravine
Spring Blossoms
The Hunt

Derek Healey
(b. 1936)

Nicholas Music, tenor

Čínské písně, op. 4
Smutek
Na řece Io-Yeh
Jarní déšť

Pavel Haas
(1899-1944)

Meridian Prall, mezzo-soprano

Water-Colors
On a Screen
The Odalisque
Highwaymen
To a Young Gentleman

John Alden Carpenter
(1876-1951)

Juliet Schlefer, soprano